

CERVANTES



EXEMPLARY NOVELS II

(Novelas ejemplares)

The English Spanish Girl - The Glass Graduate
The Power of Blood

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General editor: B. W. Ife
Cervantes Professor of Spanish, King's College, London

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra

EXEMPLARY NOVELS II

Novelas ejemplares

The English Spanish G:
La española inglesa

The Glass Graduate
El licenciado Vidriera

The Power of Blood
La fuerza de la sangre

with introduction, translation and notes
by

R. M. Price



Aris & Phillips Ltd – Warminster – England

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General Introduction

by B. W. Ife

Hidden among the many pages of preliminary matter which prefaced the first edition of Cervantes's *Exemplary Novels*¹ is a short, enigmatic prologue addressed to the reader. It is the most eloquent of all the introductions with which Cervantes customarily prefaced his works, and its witty and self-confident tone make it a fitting introduction to one of the most original, entertaining, and provocative collections of short novels in any language.

Cervantes begins his prologue with a characteristic joke at the expense of his publisher: since there is to be no engraved frontispiece featuring a portrait of the author, he will have to make up for it with a self-portrait in words. He paints a picture of a mature man, much-travelled and worldly-wise, an old soldier, proud of his record of military service and now, in later life, beginning to emerge as a literary figure with a growing awareness of his ability, and of his status in the public eye.

Having presented his credentials, Cervantes goes on to talk about his collection of twelve short, exemplary novels. He gives four main reasons why his readers should take them seriously, though not *too* seriously: they are harmless entertainment, contain profitable examples, each of them is Cervantes's own work, and they all contain a hidden mystery. These four claims have formed the basis of most subsequent criticism of the collection, and they continue to fascinate readers and critics to this day.

Though each of the claims is justified, none of them can be taken entirely at face value: the assertion that the stories are harmless, for example, is an interesting gloss on the amount of sex and violence they contain; and their claim to exemplarity may seem curiously at odds with the almost complete absence from them of explicit moral commentary. The purpose of this Introduction is to bring to the attention of the general reader the issues which lie behind the author's sometimes ambivalent and cryptic comments on the novels. As in Cervantes's prologue, a short biographical section is followed by a discussion of the four main points made by Cervantes about the meaning and purpose of the *Exemplary Novels*.

1 Preliminary matter in early Spanish printed books is copious by modern standards (c.f. José Simón Díaz, *El libro antiguo español. Análisis de su estructura*, Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 1983), but rarely as much as in the first edition of the *Novelas ejemplares*, where tax certificates and censors' reports, royal assents, a letter of dedication and several endorsements from Cervantes's well-placed friends and supporters occupy some 22 pages. For reasons of economy, the preliminaries are omitted from this edition, with the exception of the Prologue, which is given in full in Volume I.

Life and Work

... he learned patience in adversity...

On the evidence of his books, Cervantes's life had all the ingredients of a classic literary biography: poverty, hardship and rejection. In fact, and in spite of Astrana Marín's monumental 7-volume biography, very little is known for certain about the life of Spain's greatest writer. It is clear from the works themselves that Cervantes drew frequently on his own lived experience when writing; rarely does one get a stronger sense of life being transformed into art. But the dangers inherent in extrapolating a biography from a wide range of works of fiction cannot be over-estimated. We simply do not know how much of his life Cervantes put into his work, and how much he transformed it in the process.

Cervantes alludes frequently to the formative role of poverty and adversity on his character. Born in 1547 in Alcalá de Henares to a poor professional family with pretensions to nobility, Cervantes underwent a relatively haphazard education and was largely self-taught; he studied for a while in Madrid with the Erasmian humanist Juan López de Hoyos, and read widely and – by his own admission – indiscriminately. Cervantes's originality as a writer is often attributed to the relatively unstructured education he enjoyed as a youth.

In 1569 Cervantes left Madrid for Italy, and entered the service of Giulio Acquaviva before enlisting in the Spanish army. He fought under Don John of Austria in the great victory over the Turks at Lepanto in 1571, and lost his left hand, an injury of which he was inordinately proud 'since it was collected in the greatest and most memorable event that past centuries have ever seen'. Other military operations followed, in Corfu, Navarino and Tunis, and during his return journey to Spain in 1575, he was captured at sea by Turkish corsairs and taken to Algiers. There he spent five years in captivity before being redeemed by the payment of a ransom in 1580. Cervantes's experiences of military life in Italy, and more especially of prison life in north Africa, colour a great deal of his writing, and, in particular, several of the *Exemplary Novels*.

Back in Spain, Cervantes found the life of a 'returnee' frustrating and disappointing, and his attempts to build a literary career for himself met with little success in the early years. His first attempts at writing were in the popular genres of pastoral romance and the theatre. *La Galatea* appeared in 1585, but he proved to be an untalented practitioner of the one thing on which pastoral depends heavily for its success – lyric verse. His first attempts at writing plays were only slightly more successful. An unhappy marriage to a much younger girl and continued financial difficulties forced him to take a post as tax-collector in Andalusia. He travelled widely and gained considerable knowledge of rural Spain – knowledge displayed most obviously in *Don Quixote* – but he was accused of fraudulent accounting and spent at least two periods of time in prison in Seville. There he learned a great deal about organised crime and the Seville underworld, including *germanía*, the language of criminals featured in the novel *Rinconete and Cortadillo*.

In 1605 Cervantes, now settled in Valladolid, published Part I of *Don Quixote*. Although the work brought few financial rewards, it was well received in some circles and earned him a place on the fringes of the literary establishment there, and later in Madrid. The last four years of his life saw the culmination of his literary career: the

Exemplary Novels were followed in 1614 by a long allegorical poem, the *Viaje del Parnaso*; 1615 brought Part II of *Don Quixote* and the *Eight Plays and Eight Entr'actes*. His great epic novel *The Travails of Persiles and Sigismunda* was published posthumously in 1617. The prologue to this work, full of inconsequential jesting and self-deprecation, contains an uncanny prediction of the author's death, on 23 April 1616, four days after it was written.

Cervantes was the most notable of a group of writers emerging in Spain around the end of the sixteenth century who can be said to be the first practitioners of literature as a profession. Unlike virtually every Spanish writer before him, Cervantes wrote to make money. That fact alone is an important clue to the kind of writer he was, and to the nature of his success. In order to make ends meet, Cervantes *had* to be popular, and, although he was not always successful at what he attempted, he nevertheless turned his hand to virtually every major literary genre of his day. He did not attempt the verse epic, though he produced an epic in prose, and although he did not write a picaresque novel in the standard format of the genre, he made much use of picaresque conventions and low-life settings in other ways. He knew what the public liked and he tried to make sure they got it.

Cervantes's professionalism has a double significance for the *Exemplary Novels*. As a collection, the novels illustrate the enormous variety which is characteristic of his work as a whole, and, in particular, the mixing of features from established and popular genres to create something new and specifically Cervantine. Of equal significance is the way in which he consistently moves back and forth between two types of genre which at first sight might seem mutually exclusive: the high romance of the chivalresque, pastoral and Byzantine novels, and his own literary version of everyday life in contemporary Spain.²

Cervantes's interest in the full spectrum of genres available to him is important in view of the fact that he is widely perceived as a writer who made his name from debunking romance. The origin of this view undoubtedly lies in the success of *Don Quixote*. This starts out, admittedly, as a fairly conventional piece of satire. Quixote's hare-brained determination to re-enact the fantasies of chivalresque literature is shown to be an inadequate and ultimately ridiculous response to the nature of the 'real' world. But, as the novel develops, literary issues begin to predominate, and Quixote is increasingly able to make the world, not himself, look out of step.

Towards the end of Part I, he engages another character, the Canon of Toledo, in a long debate about the merits of novels of chivalry. The Canon offers some routine criticism of their implausibility, their poor construction and the adverse effects they can have on impressionable readers, like Quixote himself. But in his reply Quixote makes a strangely compelling case for the power of fiction over the rational mind, and in the story of the Knight of the Boiling Lake he evokes brilliantly the ecstasy of reading and of being transported to another world with a reality of its own.

² For a discussion of this key aspect of Cervantes's style see E.C. Riley, 'Cervantes: a Question of Genre' in *Medieval and Renaissance Studies on Spain and Portugal in Honour of P.E. Russell*, ed. F.W. Hodcroft et al., Oxford, 1981, pp. 69–85.

These issues – the persuasiveness of fiction, its pleasurable therapy, and the craft of persuasion required of the author – lie at the heart of all Cervantes's work, and the *Exemplary Novels* most of all.

The Composition of the Exemplary Novels

... *I am the first to write novels in Castilian...*

Although Cervantes did not apply for a licence to publish the *Exemplary Novels* as a collection until 1612, there is considerable evidence to suggest that some of them, at least, had been in preparation since the early 1590s. Two of them, *Rinconete and Cortadillo* and *The Jealous Old Man from Extremadura*, had already been collected in a manuscript anthology, the so-called Porras manuscript, now lost, compiled for the Archbishop of Seville, Fernando Niño de Guevara, around 1604, and both stories underwent considerable subsequent revision by Cervantes before finally being published in 1613.

Cervantes's interest in the short novel as a separate entity in its own right therefore predates his own use of the form as an interpolated narrative in a longer work. Part I of *Don Quixote* contains six such interludes, one of which, *Misguided Curiosity*, is often considered one of the best examples of the genre, while another, *The Captive's Tale*, appears to be a heavily autobiographical account of being held hostage in Algiers.

In using substantial narrative interludes in this way, to add variety to the extended romance format, Cervantes was not himself breaking new ground. Frame-stories like *The Canterbury Tales* and the *Arabian Nights* were a commonplace of medieval literature, and were undoubtedly the precedent used by writers of chivalresque and pastoral romances to build up large-scale narratives. Each time a new character is introduced, questions are asked about their past history and exploits which give rise to prolonged bouts of autobiography which can be substantial enough to constitute short, self-contained novels. The writers of picaresque novels also picked up and developed this episodic structure; *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554) contains a number of semi-autonomous anecdotes, some of popular origin, and *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599) is frequently interrupted by substantial interpolated narratives running to many thousands of words in length.

The essence of Cervantes's claim to originality, however, lies in the way in which he took the form and gave it a life of its own, liberating it from dependence on a larger structure. In this, his antecedents are Italian rather than Spanish: the *Decameron* (c. 1348) of Giovanni Boccaccio, and two collections of stories by sixteenth-century writers, the *Novelliere* (1554, 1573) of Matteo Bandello and the *Hecatommithi* (1565) of Giambattista Giralaldi Cinthio. Such collections were popular throughout Europe and provided playwrights in several countries, Shakespeare among them, with handy ideas for plots. Similar collections of anecdotes were published in Spain, but as Cervantes says in his prologue, they were usually translated or loosely adapted from foreign models; and as he does not say, but clearly implies, they were artistically vastly inferior to his own work, with thin, single-strand plots and minimal characterisation.

Cervantes claims that all his stories are his own work: 'conceived in my imagination, given birth by my pen'. This claim appears to be largely justified. Much effort has gone into tracking down sources for the novels,³ but little definitive evidence has come to light to suggest that he drew on the work of other writers; indeed, two of the censors of the first edition comment with approval on the fertility of his imagination and outstanding invention. Nevertheless, as a professional writer, Cervantes needed to be closely attuned to the tastes of his readership, and his novels have an unmistakably fashionable feel to them. No one novel may be derived from a particular source in Spanish or Italian, but the novels undoubtedly share features of plot and ethos with a wide range of popular fiction and drama throughout late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Europe.

Harmless Entertainment

... they could not provoke anyone into evil thoughts...

The Italianate origins of the short novel become apparent when we come to consider the title Cervantes chose for the collection as a whole. When he originally applied for permission to publish them, he appears to have done so under the title *Novelas ejemplares de honestísimo entretenimiento* (*Exemplary Novels of the Most Harmless Entertainment*).⁴ We do not know why Cervantes eventually preferred the shorter form, or if, indeed, the choice was his. The change may have been for reasons of euphony, or perhaps, more likely, in order to project more effectively the antithesis implicit in the collocation of *exemplary* and *novel* – for most contemporary readers, the title *Exemplary Novels* would have been a striking contradiction in terms.

In Cervantes's day, the term *novela* (Italian *novella*) was a recent coining which had not yet acquired any of the respectability which the term 'novel' now enjoys. Works of prose fiction were either called simply *libro* ('book') or *historia* ('history'), and a short, self-contained anecdote was called a *cuento* ('story'). *Novela* was rarely used in Spain to refer to a work of fiction before Cervantes's time; when it was, it suggested a low, disreputable and bawdy narrative in the style of the medieval *fabliaux*. The anecdotal origins of the *novela* can clearly be seen in such stories as *The Deceitful Marriage*.

By calling the novels 'novels' and then by qualifying them as 'exemplary' Cervantes was being deliberately provocative; he uses oxymoron in a similar way in the titles of *The Illustrious Kitchen Maid* and *The English Spanish Girl*. He was in effect challenging received opinions about the *novella* by suggesting that it was capable of greater seriousness and sophistication than had previously been thought. It is clear that Cervantes was consciously trying to extend the range of forms available to him, and to break the dominance of the long, episodic chivalresque and pastoral romances and their close cousin, the picaresque.

3 A. González de Amezúa y Mayo, *Cervantes creador de la novela corta española*. 2 vols. Madrid, 1956–8.

4 This is the form of words in which the collection is referred to by one of the censors, Salas Barbadillo, and in the royal warrant signed by the King in November 1612.

Cervantes's abiding interest in the power of fiction, and his talent for exploiting it for his readers' amusement, also made him more sensitive than most to its inherent dangers. *Don Quixote*, after all, illustrates how the mind of a gullible reader can be invaded by a potentially destructive set of moral values embodied in a fictional form. The dangers of imaginative identification with the fictional world, and the vicarious experience to which this can lead, were much commented on in Cervantes's day.⁵ In view of these concerns, it is hardly surprising that Cervantes should stress the harmlessness of the novels he is putting before his public.

In the *Exemplary Novels*, then, Cervantes was offering his readership a new, more respectable and worthwhile form of narrative which, contrary to their expectations, would not shock or offend them. And he backed up this assertion by saying that he would rather cut off the hand with which he wrote them than have anyone come to harm from reading them; no idle promise, in view of what he has just told us about having lost his other hand in battle.

The importance of entertainment – signalled in that part of the title which was eventually dropped – must also not be overlooked. Cervantes goes to some length in his prologue to stress the recreational role of literature, specifically likening his work to a popular pastime, billiards, and going on to suggest that excessive attention to work, and even to serious matters like religion, is not healthy. This stress on the value of entertainment for its own sake is further underlined by one of the censors of the first edition, Fr. Juan Bautista, who points out that both Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas considered harmless fun to be a virtue.

In the interests of entertainment, Cervantes consciously cultivated in the novels those popular themes which he knew were fashionable and which would appeal to his readers. The standard features of high romance are never far away: star-crossed lovers, journeys, ordeals, reconciliations between long-lost relatives, murder, rape, piracy and transvestite disguise. These were the stuff of popular fiction and, in particular, of the theatre, with which many of the *Exemplary Novels* bear a close relationship. Cervantes is also alert to the popularity of the picaresque, and several of the novels exploit and develop the conventions of this genre, giving him the opportunity to display his wide knowledge and experience of contemporary Spain and Italy, and the low-life settings which obviously fascinated the mainly professional and upper-class readership for which he was writing.

Exemplarity

... if you look closely, you will see that there is not one from which you cannot extract some profitable example...

Mere harmlessness, however, was not enough, particularly when the plots of most of these novels turn on such unsavoury topics as murder, rape and abduction. In these circumstances, the appeal to a 'profitable example' was not just a piece of conventional appeasement aimed at disapproving readers, but was an essential feature of Cervantes's

5 See the first two chapters of B.W. Ife, *Reading and Fiction in Golden-Age Spain*, Cambridge, 1985.

determination to raise the level of complexity and sophistication of the *novella* form. Hence the claim that the novels are called 'exemplary' because each one contains a moral, as does the collection as a whole.

But, here again, Cervantes appears open to the charge that he is being disingenuous. As far as explicit moral lessons are concerned, the stories appear to contain none – at least, nothing more than an occasional, very banal gesture towards the conventional morality of fables. The *fabliau*-type origin of *The Deceitful Marriage*, for example, is obvious enough, and in case there should be any doubt, two lines of Petrarch are quoted as a summary of the story's findings: he who succeeds by deceit will surely fail by it. *The English Spanish Girl* also has a short codetta to remind us what beauty and virtue can achieve in the face of adverse fortune, though it must be doubted if Cervantes seriously expects an intelligent reader to accept such a conclusion.

The exemplarity of the *Exemplary Novels* is, therefore, a good deal more problematic than Cervantes seems to allow at first glance. By inviting his reader to look for profitable examples which are not explicit, or explicit lessons which are banal or which offend against common sense and experience, Cervantes is underlining the way in which the 'delicious and wholesome fruit' has to be extracted by dint of careful consideration and close reading. This is not always as difficult as it may seem, for the educated reader then, as now, was perfectly capable of reading between the lines. The censor, Fr. Juan Bautista, had no trouble in finding profitable examples in both the positive and the negative senses: '[the novels] teach us by their examples to flee vice and follow virtue'. The examples may be there for us either to imitate or to shun, and we do not necessarily have to be told explicitly which is which.

The fascination of the *Exemplary Novels*, however, lies in the way they show that life is hardly ever a simple matter of black and white. So often, characters are forced to respond to events and situations which are not of their own making, in ways which at the time may seem perfectly understandable but which may lead to untold misery or undreamed-of happiness. Human nature – and divine providence – are complex matters which do not lend themselves readily to clear-cut judgments. Why are Juana Carducha's desperate measures in the face of overwhelming desire any more reprehensible than Andrés Caballero's (*The Little Gypsy Girl*)? Why are Carrizales's attempts to preserve his wife's virtue any worse than Loaysa's attempts to destroy it (*The Jealous Old Man from Extremadura*)? Why are so many wrong-doers rewarded with happy outcomes they do not appear to deserve?

What Cervantes shows is that it is both impossible and undesirable to stick the 'profitable example' onto the end of the story as an afterthought; the moral is woven into the fabric of the novel⁶ and is inextricably bound up not just with the way the tale is told, but also with the way it is read. That is why Cervantes's most typical stance is non-committal. He illustrates and leaves the reader to conclude; the quest for profit is part of the pleasure. In this way, it is perhaps better to think of the *Exemplary Novels* as providing not *examples* but *samples*, illustrations of the complexities of life and human nature, showing the kinds of ways in which people are apt to behave in a given set of

6 See B.W. Ife, 'From Salamanca to Brighton Rock', in *Essays in Honour of R.B. Tate*, ed. R.A. Cardwell, Nottingham, 1984, pp. 46–52.

circumstances. As a noun, the word *ejemplar* in Spanish can mean precisely that: a copy of a book, one instance of many, a part which stands for the whole.

But what of Cervantes's many 'samples' of circumstances and events which manifestly do not happen in real life, when the example contradicts common experience? What lessons are to be drawn from these? There are three novels in particular which appear to fly in the face of common sense, and they all concern the redemption of a heroine from circumstances into which she was placed by a criminal or immoral act. The heroines of *The Little Gypsy Girl*, *The English Spanish Girl* and *The Illustrious Kitchen Maid* are all young, beautiful, virtuous and noble, and they all help to bring about their own rescue by displaying outstanding personal qualities in the face of overwhelmingly hostile surroundings. They are all exceptional women, and their beauty and their virtue draw to them the three men who will redeem them from their alien environment and restore them to the noble, Christian world from which they were wrongfully abducted.

Such stories – and there are others which, although they do not fit this paradigm exactly, presuppose an equivalent set of values – pose a number of difficult questions to the reader in search of a profitable example. It is unlikely that anyone would reasonably conclude that Cervantes is making virtue contingent upon noble birth, or on youth and physical beauty, or that he is suggesting that integrity and truth to self will inevitably be rewarded. The reader's own experience will always reply that, in these unlikely circumstances, social conditioning would prove more powerful than innate virtue, and that, even if a gallant knight did come to the rescue, he would most likely turn out to be a blackguard in disguise.

To these objections, Cervantes would no doubt reply that his heroes and heroines are by definition exceptional – Preciosa (*The Little Gypsy Girl*) is the most strikingly beautiful, outstandingly gifted, witty, intelligent, fair-skinned, blonde-haired gypsy Andrés or anyone else has ever seen – and as such, they are the exceptions that prove the rule. And if we find it so difficult to believe that a man like Ricaredo (*The English Spanish Girl*) could make such fervent declarations of love, and mean them, and act on them to the exclusion of all other considerations, then what conclusions must we draw about the lives we lead and the cynicism with which they are shot through?

The striking, provocative and often far-fetched examples which Cervantes gives us in the more heroic of his novels provide the reader with a fascinating insight into his own response to the various forms of idealism to which the world pays lip-service every day. He gives us outstanding examples of heroism and virtue and invites us to consider why we find these examples so difficult to attain in our own lives and so difficult to accept in those of his characters. The exemplarity of each novel, then, is that of the collection as a whole, and it lies in the ability of these fictions to provoke thought and invite judgment about serious issues of moral conduct which are not nearly so distant from our own experience as their escapism might suggest.

Hidden Mystery

... since I have been bold enough to dedicate these novels to the Count of Lemos, they must contain some hidden mystery which elevates them to that level...

There is another sense in which the novels are exemplary, one which is tied up with Cervantes's claim that they contain a hidden mystery: the sense in which the novels are examples of the writer's art. At first glance, Cervantes's rather feeble joke about the elevation of the sacrament during the mass may strike the reader as in dubious taste. But the mysterious ingredient which helps to make the novels worthy of dedication to such an eminent patron is a mystery of almost comparable significance to Cervantes, the mystery of skill, of craft.⁷

Taken as a whole, the *Exemplary Novels* constitute an anthology of the many skills which the writer must exemplify, and underlying them all is an implied challenge, to Cervantes himself as well as to the reader. The task is to extend the boundaries of what is possible in fiction without losing the reader's goodwill in the process. At a key moment in *The Little Gypsy Girl*, Andrés, dissatisfied with the poet's explanation of his sudden appearance in the gypsy encampment – he claims to have lost his way –, tells him that if he must lie, he should do so with a greater semblance of truth. The poet then goes on to give an alternative, apparently more acceptable, explanation, which is much more fantastic than the first. This exchange illustrates Cervantes's fascination with making improbable things seem possible, rejecting as too facile events and situations which have the all too plausible quality of day-to-day reality.

To do this successfully involves stretching the reader's credulity while at the same time maintaining the overall credibility of the fiction. Cervantes achieves this balance by a skilful mix of two characteristic ingredients: wonder and verisimilitude. He excites the reader's amazement by offering a string of extremely unlikely occurrences, while simultaneously ensuring that, improbable though they may be, they are never quite beyond the bounds of possibility. In order to achieve this sleight of hand, he prepares each improbable turn of events with such skill that the reader is first intrigued and then captivated; and, having led the reader often further than he might otherwise have been prepared to go, he never leaves him exposed and stranded but always brings him back to safety. It is often only when we look back that we see how far we have been led by the power of fiction.

This process is most clearly illustrated in the final two stories of the collection, *The Deceitful Marriage* and *The Dialogue of the Dogs*. They are linked thematically and formally by the device of presenting the second story as having been written by the protagonist of the first. Campuzano prepares the ground with a conventional tale of confidence trickery and then persuades his interlocutor, Peralta, to read an account of a conversation between two dogs he claims to have overheard while recovering in hospital

7 The etymology of 'mystery' is in itself mysterious. Latin 'mysterium' meaning 'sacrament' is contaminated by association with 'ministerium' and acquires a secular meaning akin to 'guild', to which members or initiates are admitted by virtue of a trade or skill. Cervantes appears to combine the religious and secular implications of the word in what he says about the mystery of his own work.

from a dose of the pox. Campuzano admits many times that the story is incredible, but Peralta's understandable reluctance to believe it is gradually overcome as he is engulfed in a deepening spiral of implausibility involving magic, witchcraft and reincarnation. At the end of the story, which marks the end of the volume, Peralta emerges from the reading experience by having to concede that, even though it was incredible, it was very entertaining and very well done.

Any reader might conclude the same of the collection as a whole, and, indeed, is frequently invited to do so. It is common for characters as well as narrator to comment on the inherent unlikeliness of the very events in which they are taking part. The most improbable plots and coincidences are carefully prepared and lovingly presented in the most convincing settings, usually real places in contemporary Spain; outrageous outcomes are shown to develop with inexorable logic; and all this is done with the imperceptible craftsmanship of the pickpocket.

A key factor in his success is Cervantes's mixing of genre. Critics have often tried to categorise each of the stories, and the predominance of one or other genre has been used unsuccessfully as a guide to the date of composition of individual novels.⁸ In fact, none of the stories is entirely untouched by the imaginative freedom which is characteristic of romance, and none – even those with plots which are most obviously reminiscent of romance – is entirely divorced from the contemporary world in which they were written. *The Power of Blood* opens with a casual stroll on a warm evening in Toledo, *The English Spanish Girl* is steeped in the religious and political struggles of contemporary Europe, *The Illustrious Kitchen Maid* is largely set in a well-known inn in Toledo.

This mixture of the palpably real and the improbably fantastic is the essence of the Cervantine trade mark, and it serves two main purposes. In purely functional terms, the creation of a strong sense of place, not common in European fiction at the time, provides a kind of anchor for the flights of fancy: a solid foundation on which tall stories can be built with greater confidence. But descriptions of interiors, dress, the rigging of ships, squares and fountains do not in themselves guarantee a convincing fiction, and Cervantes would be the first to admit that the greater conviction comes from the inherent truth, the psychological and moral plausibility of the story.

In broader terms, the purpose of mixing genres lies in the potential to show the spiritual truth which underlies the commonplace exterior, and in this way the exemplarity and the wonderment are made to work together. What Cervantes is doing in creating a character like Costanza, for example, a beacon of moral and spiritual probity in a world of decadence and corruption, is akin to what Velázquez does in pictures like *The Drunkards* and *Vulcan's Forge*: both artists bring the mythical world into contact with the real. Like Velázquez, Cervantes imbues the tawdry and the down-at-heel with beauty and nobility, and shows the human spirit triumphantly at odds with its surroundings. The truthfulness of this story comes not from its low-life setting, its thieves and prostitutes, but from Cervantes's demonstration that integrity and steadfastness can not only redeem Costanza, but illuminate the lives of all those with whom she comes into contact.

8 A. González de Amezúa y Mayo, *Cervantes creador*, argues that the trajectory of Cervantes's work is from idealistic fiction towards realism, while Ruth El Saffar, *Novel to Romance*, Baltimore, 1974, argues the contrary.

All the novels in the collection, in their different ways, operate on the reader in a similar fashion. They are intriguing, compelling and ultimately persuasive if, like Peralta, we are prepared to go with the flow; and if we care to examine the basis of our own response to them, they are full of profitable examples. Like Costanza, they all have that quality of entertaining and elevating mystery which makes them shining examples of their kind.

This Edition

The Spanish text of this, the first complete parallel edition of the *Exemplary Novels*, has been established with reference to the 1613 edition, and to those of Schevill and Bonilla, Avalle-Arce and Sieber. The translations have been newly commissioned for this series.

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General

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